

“A Tale of Two Goats”

Dealing appropriately with shame is a process. It would be great if we could wave a magic wand and shame would disappear. But, I think you understand that living in a shame based society, being raised in shame based homes and attending shame based churches that we didn't get into this predicament overnight and we probably won't overcome our shame nor develop healthy habits overnight either. That's almost an oxymoron. Habits are actions, patterns and attitudes that are developed over time. A habit might have begun last night but you won't be able to call it a habit for perhaps years.

I have shared with you over the last several weeks several steps that are necessary to develop healthy patterns of living that does not include shame. Step # 1 was, Quit chasing the rabbit. The rabbit is a reliance upon performance to feel adequate. But, remember just like those sleek, speedy greyhounds, no one ever catches the rabbit. If self worth is based upon performance, you will never catch that rabbit. Step #2 was, Fix Your Eyes on Jesus. The only way to get your eyes off that rabbit and resist the temptation to run after it, is to fix your gaze on something else. Last week we learned that Step # 3 was, surrender to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Remember that conviction will initially feel a lot like shame. That's the way our enemy hooks us, much of the sin we fall under looks a lot and feels a lot like the real thing. An example is that whole lust/love thing. Likewise, the remedy for our problems looks and feels like the real thing. But, the near real thing shame, always

leads us to hide from God. Conviction leads us back to the Father. This week, Step #4 is learn to set appropriate boundaries.

Do you remember several years ago when Indianapolis first offered “Large Item Pick-up” trash days? I’m sure you know how it works. For several weeks, a certain geographical area of Indianapolis is designated each day as the area where we can put large items that would not normally not be picked up on a weekly basis. You can put out old appliances, furniture, old gas grills, stuff like that out by the curb and a special contractor picks them up for disposal. Well anyway, the first year we had “Large Item Pick-up” I put some old metal cabinets, an old swing and several decrepit pieces of old lawn furniture out by the road. Now one thing you need to understand is, is that I am pretty good at repairing a lot of stuff. If I put it by the curb you can bet that it’s in pretty bad shape. When I went outside to get the paper the next morning a little before six A.M. the stuff was gone. I thought to myself, Wow, the city has finally gotten its act together. I got that stuff out there late last night and its gone already. But, strangely, my next door neighbor had a huge pile of old carpet tied up in rolls next to the curb. I thought, “He should have gotten his stuff out there last night like me, now he’ll have to carry it back to his garage and put it out a little bit at a time.” Patting myself on the back for being so efficient, Gayle will be so proud of my performance.” (I was still chasing the rabbit back then.) But, my bubble was soon burst. Because as I looked down the road, there were a couple of pick-up trucks parked along my street in front of other neighbors pile of “large trash.” It wasn’t the city workers at all who had picked up my trash, someone else had. Actually, Indianapolis really has the largest swap meet in the state once a year. In fact, a

friend of mine at the Indy Star tells me that there are some individuals who have made a small business out of “Large Item Pick-up” time. Last year, I put an old bicycle out for large pick-up day. I hadn’t even gotten in the house yet when a lady stopped and asked if the bicycle was any good. I started telling her about it’s need for a new chain, derailleur, cables and some TLC but other than that it was in ok shape. I caught myself extolling the virtue of this old bicycle that I had no need for and realized that I was actually standing there selling someone on the idea of taking my trash. GO FIGURE. Anyway, for the purpose of Step # 4, I have a gas grill on our back deck. On large trash pick-up day, even a simple child knows that you can have whatever stuff is next to the curb but you can’t come into the back yard and get my gas grill. But the moment that I drag it from around back, to the curb, it becomes fair game. It is clear to everyone. Stuff on the curb is available. The hose next to the house is mine. I don’t have to put up an electric fence or post “No Trespassing” signs to communicate what’s in bounds and what’s not. They become available to everyone else when they cross the imaginary boundary. We are all good at figuring that boundary out, we are not so good at figuring out other boundaries or setting boundaries for that matter.

In healthy families, children learn about boundaries from their parents. Things like privacy. They learn that certain body parts are not for others to touch, that they should share their toys, that they should keep things confidential. In the Stratton household my kids learned not to tell Miss Eleanor that her breath was bad or Horace that his toupee was on backwards, you know important church political things.

In shame based homes, healthy boundaries don't emerge naturally. Parents who don't have healthy boundaries themselves often make too much of their emotional life available to the child. Too many emotionally distraught parents make children confidants to sooth their own loneliness. They try to be their best friend instead of the parent. When healthy boundaries are not present, a person, in effect, puts way too much stuff on the curbside for "Large Item Pick-up." And, when we constantly put stuff like our time, our sexuality, our emotional energy, our money and talents at the curbside, is it any wonder that passerby's assume they can help themselves to all that stuff. When we get emotionally and spiritually attached to everyone needing "our stuff" we so often get to the point where we never say no because we feel guilty if we and our stuff are not available. All those burdens are placed on our backs. There is a wonderful old testament "Tale of Two Goats." The first goat was the sacrifice. Innocent blood shed on the Day of Atonement. We celebrate such a sacrifice this weekend as we commemorate the lamb that was slain, innocent blood shed for sin.

The first goat was a yearly payment for sin, bearing the punishment that the people deserved. The first goat brought forgiveness. The first goat was a gracious provision from a gracious God. But one goat wasn't enough. Why? Because even though the debt was paid, the haunting memory of failure continued. The debt was gone with the first goat but the shame lingered on. Listen to the Old Testament "Tale of Two Goats."

⁵ From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁷ Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD

at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹ Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat. ²⁰ "When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

If you haven't asked it, there is no more urgent question that you can ask than, "What must I do to be saved?" But if you have, you must also remember that there was a second goat for a reason. There is a second goat because there is a second question, not as urgent as the first but very, very important nonetheless. The question is, "What must I do to be healed?" It is not enough for the sin to be gone and the guilt to be dealt with but how can we be cleansed from the haunting memory of our repeated failures?

Most Christians I know have received the gift of Christ as payment for their sins, but have not received the gift of Christ as the bearer of their shame. I think this explains why so many believers, though knowing that Jesus died for them, still feel guilty. It explains why Christians, who are free from the law, are still trying to earn their way into the heaven that they have already been promised. It explains why a person can be born-again, bound-

for-eternal-glory child of God, and be meaner than a junkyard dog. And it explains why we put too much of our “large items” on the curbside of life.

If our sins are paid for by the first goat’s blood, but our shame is unhealed, we will always be looking for another goat. That’s why wounded people wound people. That’s why ashamed people shame people. That’s why we need Jesus not only to save us but to heal us. Isaiah foretold it. Isaiah 53:10 says it this way, because we needed a savior, it “was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer...” and to make “his life a guilt offering. It is because we also needed someone to bear our shame that Isaiah said in verse four, “he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.” An infirmity is a condition we have no control over, that’s our sin, the sorrows are those emotions that come as a result of that sin, shame.

In our shame based world we can’t stop someone from attempting to shame us but we do have a choice about what we let into our head. We have the responsibility to set appropriate boundaries for others. You see there is nothing inherent within the Hebrew scapegoat that makes it a scapegoat! If you remember from our reading it’s just an ordinary goat upon which the lot fell. We don’t lay ceremonial hands upon our scapegoats but we have many ways to make the transfer don’t we? In our culture we do it through name calling, gossip, mockery even cursing. But, Christians have found religious words to make the transfer of shame, “We really need to be praying for Susan, did you hear about the affair?” Translated, “I don’t feel good about my own life, my own marriage but I would never do that!”

And, have you ever noticed that what you like least about someone else is what you like least about yourself? Whatever bothers you most about someone else is probably what bothers you most about yourself. We have our scapegoats, or perhaps you feel like one. The purpose of the Day of Atonement ceremony was to shift the shame. The purpose of turning the scapegoat into the wilderness was because we don't want to see our shame. But we can have a ticket out of the wilderness of shame. God let it be known centuries ago through his words about the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus that we would not be able to carry such a burden ourselves. He also knew that the symbolic carrier, the scapegoat would be insufficient as well so he gave us Jesus. Jesus who Paul says, endured the shame of the cross, Jesus who Isaiah said would carry our sorrows. Jesus whom Easter heralds the promise of salvation from sin and healing from the devastation of the shame of that sin. God has set Jesus squarely within the boundary that encompasses our shame. It is neither a boundary we need cross nor a wilderness within we must dwell.

Sadly, there is no other organization that applauds the scapegoat louder than the church. We are confused because the bible teaches us to turn the other cheek and if someone asks you for your coat, give them your shirt as well. Martyrs are praised for their bravely dying and we know that it is more blessed to give than receive. While certain verses seem to encourage a boundary-less life of the scapegoat, look at Jesus. Look at how sharply he defined himself. He not only was known to dismiss a crowd in order to be alone (Mark6:45) but on one occasion said to a dear friend, "Satan get behind me. (Mark 8:33) After a leper was cleansed and told everyone about the healing, Jesus sets a boundary and

no longer went into the towns but stayed outside in what the Bible calls “lonely places.” (Mark 1:40-45) Even in the laying down of his life Jesus made it very clear that he was setting the boundary and the agenda. John records it this way, “I lay down my life...no one takes it from me.” (John 10:17-18) How can we know the difference between a life of Godly surrender and a life of unhealthy shame based boundaries?

It is all in the motivation. The scapegoat takes on more and more responsibility because he or she feels like they have to. The spirit filled person gives because of the leading of God and the overflow of love. Does God call you to have a life of complete surrender to him? Absolutely. Does he want us to live lives of giving and service. Most definitely. But he never wants you to give out of compulsion or fear. He intends for your ministry, like your life, to be an overflow of the abundance of love and joy he’s deposited in you. You don’t have to be a scapegoat, Jesus has already taken that role upon himself. He would be the first goat, bleeding to pay the debt. He would also be the second goat carrying your shame and sorrow. If you have taken a step to trust that Jesus’ death has paid for your sins then you know it is a matter of faith. You acknowledge that you are completely bankrupt. You can’t pay for your own sins, and trust that Jesus has done it for you. You let him pay the price.

Letting Christ bear your shame is a step of faith too. You let him be the scapegoat so that you won’t have to. You understand the boundary of what you can and cannot do. You step out of the wilderness of shame. Release your burdens to him and refuse to carry the burdens of anyone else. Not only is it impossible to bear everyone’s burdens , it isn’t

necessary. Jesus already has. Please hear this, take this step, set your boundary, you don't have to be anybody's scapegoat. Jesus is the spotless lamb, who shed his blood for your sins and who is our scapegoat.